

Beat The Heat

BEAT THE HEAT: HAVE A PLAN

DOVER – Do you have a heat wave plan? Heat ranks among the top weather-related killers in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The Delaware Division of Public Health (DPH) advises Delawareans to expect more heat waves, when temperatures exceed 95 degrees. Climate change is causing the average high temperature to increase and for there to be longer and more frequent periods of extreme heat. Our bodies have less chance to recover during hot days and warm nights, placing everyone at risk for heat illness. When temperatures and humidity are high, sweat ceases to evaporate and the body's natural cooling system slows down or shuts down completely. Very hot weather can cause heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and severe respiratory conditions, which can be fatal.

Extreme heat especially endangers seniors, young children, people with disabilities, and individuals with breathing conditions and other chronic medical conditions, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and other respiratory and cardiovascular problems. Those without air-conditioning, fans, or access to cooling shelters are also at risk.

DPH recommends that every household have a heat wave plan in case of power outages. Have air conditioners serviced and obtain electric fans now. Keep cases of bottled water on hand. Listen to news reports of the location of community 'cooling centers' – often public libraries or churches – so household members know where they are located if the power goes out. During extreme heat days, Delawareans should check on their vulnerable family members and neighbors.

Delaware 2-1-1 connects Delawareans with critical services and

supports. Eligible callers can receive referrals to summer cooling and crisis assistance, the City of Wilmington's Free Electric Fan Program for seniors, and nearby cooling centers.

Tips to prevent heat illness:

- Do not leave a child or pets alone in a parked car, even for a minute. Call 911 if you see a child left unattended in a vehicle. Carry water with you and drink continuously even if you do not feel thirsty. Avoid drinks containing sugar, alcohol and caffeine, which dehydrate the body. (Check with a doctor before increasing fluid intake if you have epilepsy, heart, kidney or liver disease, or if you are on a fluid-restrictive diet. Avoid using salt tablets unless directed to do so by a physician.) Visit www.cdc.gov/nutrition/everyone/basics/water.html for more information.

- Stay indoors on the lowest floor possible. Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing. Wear a hat or use an umbrella. Use sunscreen. Sunburn slows the skin's ability to cool itself, and has been linked to skin cancer. Avoid extreme temperature changes. Be careful trying to cool down too quickly; a cold shower immediately after coming in from hot temperatures can lead to hypothermia, particularly for the elderly and children. In these cases, cool water is better than ice cold water.

- Limit outdoor activity, especially mid-day when the sun is hottest. Work out or hold team practices early in the morning, or in the early evening. A CDC online course for coaches, athletic trainers, students, school nurses, parents, and teachers is at www.cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/extreme/Heat_Illness/index.html

Heed the following heat danger warning signs and take suggested actions:

- Heat cramps occur in the muscles of the limbs or abdomen

occurring during or after physical activity in high heat. Sweating results in loss of fluids and salts that cause muscle cramps. Address heat cramps by resting in a cool place and drinking plenty of water.

- Heat exhaustion is more severe, occurring when a person is overheated along with reduced or unbalanced intake of fluids. Symptoms include dehydration, fatigue, weakness, clammy skin, headache, nausea and/or vomiting, rapid breathing, irritability, and fainting. Take these simple steps to reduce heat exhaustion: Move the person indoors or into shade. Loosen or remove the person's clothing. Encourage the person with heat exhaustion to eat and drink. Get the person to a cool shower or bath. Call your doctor for further advice.

- Heat stroke occurs when the body can no longer cool itself, and can be a life-threatening event. Prompt medical treatment is required. Symptoms include: flushed, hot and dry skin with no sweating; high body temperature (above 103 F, taken orally); severe, throbbing headache; weakness, dizziness, or confusion; sluggishness or fatigue; decreased responsiveness; and loss of consciousness. If heat stroke occurs, take these steps: Call 9-1-1 immediately. This is a medical emergency. Get the heat stroke victim indoors or into shade. Get the person into a cool shower or bath, or wipe them down with continuously soaked cool washcloths while awaiting emergency responders.

For more information, visit the CDC at <http://www.cdc.gov/extremeheat/warning.html>.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind, or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit delawarerelay.com.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, drink almost no sugary beverages.

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Rita Landgraf, Secretary

Jill Fredel, Director of Communications

302-255-9047, Cell 302-357-7498

Email: jill.fredel@delaware.gov

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